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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS FR 002119

SIPDIS

STATE FOR IO and NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNESCO](#) [FR](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: UNESCO DIRECTOR GENERAL RACE: OBTAINING FRENCH SUPPORT  
AGAINST HOSNI

REF: PARIS FR 02103

Classified by Ambassador Louise V. Oliver for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Government of France (GOF) does not want the Egypt's Culture Minister Farouk Hosni to become UNESCO's next Director General and are looking for a way to escape from President Sarkozy's informal statements of support made to President Mubarak in the autumn of 2007. Reiteration in Cairo of U.S. opposition to Hosni (reftel) would make the U.S. position clear and give the French the opportunity they are looking for. Hosni's candidacy would be in real difficulty if both the U.S., UNESCO's largest contributor, and France, UNESCO's host and current EU president, line up against him. Since the Egyptians have not yet formally nominated Hosni, there is the possibility that with strong U.S. and French pressure, the Egyptians will decide not to move forward with Hosni. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The French Ambassador to UNESCO, Catherine Colonna, told Ambassador Oliver in a meeting on November 14 that the GOF does not want Egypt's Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosni, to be the next Director General of UNESCO. She went on to say that they would be concerned about any Arab candidate, given the strong regional solidarity that exists among the Arab states. However, President Sarkozy's informal comments to President Mubarak one year ago suggesting French support for Mr. Hosni have put the GOF in an awkward position.

¶3. (C) In addition to France's being one of Egypt's largest trading partners, President Sarkozy is co-chairing the new Union of the Mediterranean with President Mubarak. For the past year, the French have refrained from formalizing their informal endorsement, in the hope that something would derail Mr. Hosni's candidature.

¶4. (C) The French UNESCO Ambassador was therefore very pleased when Ambassador Oliver told her that she had informed the Egyptian Ambassador to UNESCO, Dr. Shadia Kenawy, that the U.S. had decided not to support Mr. Hosni's candidature (reftel). Ambassador Colonna agreed that this should enable the GOF to tell the Egyptians that the GOF also has grave concerns about Mr. Hosni and would not support his candidacy. The French Ambassador also said that strong support from the GOF that enabled an Egyptian to be chosen recently for a very high-level post at the IMF has taken care of their obligations to Egypt.

¶5. (C) The GOF first became aware of U.S. opposition to Hosni's candidacy as a result of high-level communications between the U.S. and GOF several weeks ago before a meeting in Paris between President Sarkozy and President Mubarak. In the end, it turned out the subject of the election for the next Director General of UNESCO was not raised during the Sarkozy-Mubarak meeting. Many at UNESCO, including the Egyptians themselves, assume that they already have French endorsement. Ambassador Kenawy told Ambassador Oliver directly that

they do. Both Ambassador Kenawy and the Egyptian Representative to UNESCO's Executive Board, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Hany Helal, who is a former staff member at UNESCO, have been actively campaigning at UNESCO.

¶6. (C) When Ambassador Oliver informed Ambassador Colonna that the Egyptians had not yet sent a letter to UNESCO formally nominating Mr. Hosni as their candidate, Ambassador Colonna said that fact was a very important reason to put pressure on Egypt now to stop them from moving forward formally with Mr. Hosni's candidacy. The French Ambassador added that she did not think that the GOF was really focusing on the UNESCO election at the moment, but that she would try to encourage it to do so, given the information that the U.S. Ambassador had shared with her. The French Ambassador also thought that the U.S. should stay quiet at UNESCO for the moment about its position on Hosni in order to allow the Egyptians to consider ways of ending Mr. Hosni's candidacy without being perceived as doing it under U.S. pressure.

¶7. (C) Comment: It is clear that there is a short window of opportunity for stopping the Hosni candidacy before it becomes formalized. In order to make that happen, two things must be done as soon as possible. First, the U.S. position must be confirmed in Cairo so that there is no doubt about the U.S. position. Second, the GOF must be asked to speak to the Egyptians both in Cairo and at UNESCO so that the Egyptians know that the U.S. is not the only major country that does not support the Hosni candidacy. Other countries including Lebanon, Algeria, and Brazil are considering nominating candidates, but they will not do so if they think that the Egyptian candidacy has the support necessary to win the Director General election. Although concerns about the U.S.-Egyptian bi-lateral relationship are understandable, there would be much less damage to U.S.-Egyptian relations if Egypt withdrew its candidate quietly, than if it is forced to do so in the face of public U.S. opposition.

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Strong pressure from both the U.S. and France is the most likely way to prevent the Hosni candidacy from moving forward, thereby enabling the U.S. to identify an acceptable alternative candidate. If the Egyptians persist in nominating Mr. Hosni as their official candidate despite U.S.-French opposition, a different - and likely more difficult- strategy will need to be developed.

OLIVER